No. 98

# The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"You are far too pretty for that," he replied. "Some day one of these farmers will propose and run off with you."

R. of M. G., No. 98.

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MRS. FAIRFAX paused in her narrative to Graham, and he could see the suppressed emotions in her every action. He was about to remonstrate and ask her to ceased if the telling of the narrative opened any wounds of her memory or caused her to become excited, but she continued before he had time to utter a word.

"I can not remember what I answered the young man, I was so excited that he had chosen me for a companion for a short walk. But whatever I said must have been satisfactory to him, for he walked beside me and began to talk.

"His voice was mellow and low. It was the most musical voice I ever heard, I believe.

"He spoke with understanding about current events, music, theaters and all the beautiful things, I knew of only through the newspapers and magazines.

"He told me frankly that his home was in London and that he was in the employ of a large London concern that sent traveling men all over the Bristish Isles.

"Though half against my will, I found myself listening with rapt attention.

"As we strolled on and on, we came to a strip of dense wood. It was very dark. He was walking close beside me and I imagined I could feel him tremble.

"His voice, too, as he continued to talk, seemed less steady.

"Then I began to grow uneasy, hardly knowing why. He had not said a single word, or made a move that might have frightened me. So I felt perfectly safe in the thought; was he not a gentleman?

"Suddenly I felt his hand on my shoulder.

" 'Hadn't we better go back?' he asked gently.

"I looked at him.

" 'You see," he added, 'I am not afraid in the dark,

but you might be.'

"We stopped abruptly as if by mutual consent.

"The road was narrow and bordered on both sides by thick woods and underbrush. It was so dark, I could hardly see his face, but I could hear his hard breathing.

"Then he took a step toward me.

' 'You were not meant for a God-forsaken place like this,' he said. 'You are far too intelligent and too pretty a girl. It seems a shame that you must waste your accomplishments in a dreary little town like this one.'

"Of course, I was pleased that he called intelligent and accomplished. Other men had told me that I was pretty, but not one had ever given me credit for being anything else that was worth mentioning.

"Then he laid both of his hands on my shoulders.

"I saw a gleam in his eyes that somehow frightened me.

" 'Why don't you come to London?' he spoke softly. 'That is the city of wonderful opportunities for a girl like you.'

"I did not know what to answer. I frankly was so pleased that I could not find words to express myself. Having called me intelligent made me want to say something above the ordinary, but I could not find the suitable words.

"We walked slowly back toward the town. He kept closely to my side and remained silent for a long time.

"For my part, I was deeply in thought about what he had told me. To see London, had always been one of my fondest dreams. To me it had always been the most wonderful city in the whole world.

" 'Why don't you come to London?' he asked again quite suddenly.

" 'I'd be glad to go if I had the chance,' I blurted out at last with a frankness that seemed to startle him some.

"By this time we had come within sight of the houses.

"I stopped and warned him that my parents must not see us together. He looked deeply into my eyes and seemed reluctant to leave me.

" 'Where are you going to-morrow evening?' he inquired a little anxiously. 'I'll come over to your home and see you if you don't mind.'

"That frightened me.

" 'My father doesn't like strangers, especially if they come from England,' I replied. 'He is an old Rebel who fought in the rebellion for the Irish. He hates the English!

"He uttered a low laugh.

" 'Well, I'll come anyway,' he said, still laughing. 'I don't think I will have any trouble convincing your father that, although I am what he calls a bloody Englishman, I am not his enemy. May I come?'

"I did not say yes or no, but gathered my warp closer about me and hurried away.

"Within a short distance of my home I looked back and I could still see him standing on the same spot where I had left him.

"I knew that some of the town gossips had seen me, but I cared little about that. My mind was too filled with other and far more important things.

"For one thing, flirting was approved by youthful public opinion in our little town as a legitimate variation from the monotony of every day life.

"But I had some very strict ideas of my own with regard to this matter until this, my first temptation came.

"As I paused at our gate, I could still see him. I followed him with my eyes until he entered the hotel. And I can recall how sorry I was when he passed entirely out of sight.

"No man had ever attracted me—that is no man except this one of my girlish dreams. To me he seemed everything the others were not. He stood above all other men head and shoulders.

"He had the looks, the manners and wore up-to-date clothes. Further than that I did not care.

"Somehow he had the same effect upon me as the fast express trains, those haughty, luxurious limited trains that dashed through our little town with disdainful and mocking shrieks, and fled from it without a pause as if they could not endure the sight of it.

"To me those wonderful trains and their beautifully dressed passengers, seen through the glass windows, were teasing, taunting glimpses of paradise, maliguantly given and snatched away.

"But the hero of my girlish dreams had come at last.

"He was the envoy from beyond the hills, and it seemed to me that he had been sent purposely to make my dreams come true.

"Poor, deluded fool, that I was.

"When at last I entered the house, I told my mother amid many blushes what had taken place.

"She scolded me at first, but when I told her what a perfect gentleman he was, she grew less angry and at last became interested and rather curious. Upon informing her that he intended to call on me the next night, she held up her hands in horror.

" 'What will your father say?' she asked, frightened. 'Don't you know that he is an Englishman?'

"I told her that I knew it.

"'You know that he would never allow that young man in the house,' she said. 'It will never do, my child.'

"I was at a loss what to say or do. My mother was right. To bring him into our house would surely have meant trouble. All the arguments in the world could not have changed my father's viewpoint so far as all the men from England were concerned.

"A long space of painful silence followed. I glanced at my mother through the corners of my eyes. She was thinking.

"'Wel,' she said presently. 'I suppose this young man is all right. But if he comes to the house to-morrow night, I must find some means to send your father away. He would be sure to make a fuss if we receive one of those Englishman."

Chapter 328

## THE HAWK

MRS. FAIRFAX had paused to take a long breath. Her eyes, still wonderfully bright, took on a dreamy expression. Her spirit was many miles away from the present scene. It was traveling along the endless road of yesterday. It brought back to her mind many things she had tried to forget and couldn't.

It was the slight creaking of Ericsen's chair as he moved slightly that brought it back. A reminiscent smile crossed her face as she went on somewhat more hurriedly:

"That night I could hardly sleep. I could not analyze my own feelings. All I knew was that I had met the handsomest man in all the world and that he had been very kind to me.

"I could scarcely wait until the folowing evening came.

"And I do not know how my mother contrived it, but she did send my father away shortly after supper. I saw him go down the street and my heart felt somewhat light.

"Toward eight o'clock I was standing at the window, waiting anxiously for the arrival of the man from London.

"He came at last.

"When I introduced him to my mother I could see at the first glance that he had made an extremely favorable impression upon her. She admired him openly.

"After we were seated he talked for quite a while,

completely ignoring me.

"I was becoming angry and hardly heard what he was saying. I wondered if he had come really to see me or to chat with my mother. I believe I was getting very jealous.

"He must have wormed himself speedily into her confidence and good graces, for when a little later I followed her from the room, she patted me on the back.

" 'He is a dandy fellow, my dear child,' she told me. 'All the other girls in town will envy you, for I know that they have been setting their caps for him. He is the kind of a man any woman might be proud of. And he is such a fine gentleman.'

"And I was happier than I had ever been in my life, for in my ignorance I imagined I had captured a prize. Little did I dream what a horrible fate was in store for me.

"I took my time about going back into the parlor. When I entered at last I found him standing at the window.

"He turned swiftly and I read reproach in his fine dark eyes.

" 'I thought you were never coming back,' he said, pouting.

" 'Mother kept me,' I fibbed.

" 'Ah, I see,' he smiled again. 'I like your mother very much.'

"I was on the verge of saying that my mother liked him, but I pressed my lips firmly together.

"We sat down and began to chat about different matters. It was a revelation to me to hear him speak about operas, good music and current events. There wasn't a single thing he could not talk about in the most convincing manner.

" 'How do you manage to spend all your time in

this lonely, little town?' he asked suddenly. 'Should imagine you would die of ennui.'

"'Oh, I do a lot of reading since I graduated from high school,' I answered, blushing. 'I get very lonesome at times, but what can one do? There isn't much here in the way of amusement. We hardly ever see a really good show. We have a church social from time to time, that's about all.'

"He uttered a soft laugh and took a hold of my hand.

"'I suppose you'll marry one of these farmers around here some day,' he said with another laugh that implied the absurdity of making such a descent. 'Then you'll have plenty to do. I imagine you'd look bewitching in the garb of a dairy maid or something of that sort.'

"He kept on laughing in a way that irritated me not a little.

"So far I had never thought of marrying, and if I did, I was quite sure that I would never become the wife of one of those clumsy farmers or lazy loafers about town.

"And how often have I thought afterwards, how much better it would have been for my moral welfare if I had married an honest farmer.

"Ah, what bitter heartaches I might have been spared.

"'I shall probably never marry,' I told him coquettishly. 'I am still too young to even think about it. I think the fates have already decreed that I shall be an old maid.'

"He shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"'You are far too pretty for that,' he replied. 'Some day one of these farmers will propose and run off with you. I'd do it myself if I were a tiller of the soil and lived near you.'

"I was flattered and I did not object when he insisted upon holding my hand.

" 'You ought to come to London,' he exclaimed enthusiastically. 'You could make something out of yourself there. I think it is a crime to allow a bright young girl like you to waste your time in an insignificant little burg like this.'

"I said nothing in reply because I did not know what to say.

"Then he launched forth in eloquence as he had done the evening before, describing the joys and the pleasures of London. He spoke of the many dances, theaters, of bands playing in gardens every night, and the clothes and the jewels the women in the big city wore.

"His flowing language, his evident intimacy with the world he so vividly described, coupled now and then voluable flatteries to me—all that put me into a fever of delight.

"He had given me a glimpse into paradise.

"Then my spirit of romance and adventure rose. I really longed to explore the mysteries of one of the greatest cities in the world.

"In my limited experience, evil had always been associated with brutality of speech and looks and habits by the sommon class of people who formed the dregs of our community.

"And in the story papers, in books and magazines, had not the polished villain always born upon his face the unmistakable marks of villainy? This man who spoke to me now could not be base and vile. His manner, his speech and chivalry argued against it.

"Before he left me that night, he pressed me to his bosom and kissed me. I did not object, for I would not have offended him for the world.

"And yet, I thought it rather strange that he did this without speaking one word of love.

" 'Will you meet me to-morrow night?' he asked as we stood on the front porch. 'It is going to be one of those beautiful moonlight nights made for lovers.'

"For a moment I did not know what to answer him.

"As I looked into his handsome face I noticed his frown. Finally I agreed to meet him without the knowledge of my parents.

"That was the greatest mistake I ever made in my life.

"Of course, I met him that night. And we met again and again. For my sake he deferred his departure for another week.

"But long before the hour came that he had to leave, I knew that I had met my fate. I loved him better than any other living being on earth. I loved him so madly that I would gladly have given my own life to spare him a moment's pain.

"He shrewdly offered to speak to my parents about our mutual love and ask their consent to a speedy and happy marriage.

"I dissuaded him from doing this, because I now wanted to spare him the humiliation of being flatly refused by my father. And it wouldn't only be a refusal. My father, when in a rage, was terrible. And he could not speak of an Englishman without flying into a terrible rage.

"I dreaded to think what would happen if an Englishman came and asked for my hand in marriage.

"In addition to this, I was entirely too young to marry, for I was barely seventeen. Then my father had often told me that he would rather see me dead than married to a 'damned bloody Englishman' as he often

called them.

"It was the night before he intended to leave.

"We met at our usual trysting place. My heart was heavy and sad because he was to go and I would not see him again for several months.

"I wept quietly to myself, which seemed to affect him deeply.

" 'I can't bear to leave you, little girl,' he cried, folding me into his arms. 'I love you dearly, dearly. If it were possible I would never leave this enchanted little town again.'

"He kissed me again and again, and I was very happy.

"A feeling came over me that I had never experienced before. I clung to him desperately, begging him not to go. I shall never forget how he crushed me to his heart and uttered every imaginable term of endearment in my ear.

" 'We could always be together, if you only say the word,' he told me softly. 'An elopement would be so romantic.'

" 'No—no,' I demurred. 'I could never leave my parents without having received their blessing and without bidding them good-by. They were always so good to me.'

"I saw him frown slightly.

" 'But you know how utterly impossible it is under the circumstances,' he argued. 'Your father hates all Englishmen. He would never give his consent to our marriage. There is only one way, my little darling.'

"I wept bitter tears and he began to grow extremely impatient.

"Then he unfolded a plan by which we would leave town together and go to London, where he was to marry me immediately after our arrival. At first I objected, but

finally succumbed to his soft persuasion and subtle flattery.

"Before we separated that night he had my promise that I would meet him the following night ready to elope with him.

"All that night I lay awake thinking. I was tossing and groaning on my bed. Once my mother came in and wanted to know if I was sick. I tried to quiet her fears and told her that I had had a bad dream.

"But I had not even slept. I knew that I was about to do wrong, and yet the mere thought of losing him made the world a desolate place to live in.

"I often wondered afterwards how I found the necessary courage to deceive my good parents.

"But I had been blinded. I was like a woman under a hypnotic spell. I knew that I would follow him anywhere he suggested. I loved him wildly. And had he not promised to make me his wife?

"The next day I made the necessary preparations secretly.

"Pleading a headache I stayed in my room and behind locked doors I packed what clothing I might need into a traveling bag.

"When this task was complete, I hid the bag under the bed. It took all the nerve and courage I had to go downstairs and face my mother. I feared that she would read what was constantly churning in my mind.

"The moment I came into the kitchen where she was getting supper ready, she looked me over critically with a worried frown.

"'Are you feeling better?' she inquired.

"I assured her that I felt quite well, in fact well enough to attend a gathering of young folk that was to be held that night at the home at one of my intimate girl friends.

"My lover had asked me to meet him at the railroad station about eleven o'clock.

"He also advised me to come heavily veiled to avoid being recognized. And so having taken the necessary precautions, I had no trouble getting away.

"My lover was pacing back and forth on the platform and ran to meet me as soon as he saw me approaching him.

"'Ah, I am so glad you have come,' he cried joyously.

"Then he kissed me passionately.

"'I was afraid you would fail me,' he whispered. 'You sweet, sweet girl.'

"I could not speak, for my throat was choked with tears.

"You must not forget that I was leaving the best parents any girl ever had to go with this man, who was almost a total stranger to me. My heart was sad and very, very heavy.

"But I sought comfort in the thought that I was soon to become his wife. And as soon as the marriage ceremony had been performed I meant to write home and ask to be forgiven.

"My dear daddy had never refused me anything. As for my mother, I knew how happy she would be to take me into her arms again.

"There was a dreadful surprise in store for me, however. My lover was very kind to me during the trip to London. Again and again he told me how dear I was to him.

"I was the happiest girl in all the world that night.

"Every word he spoke was a caress. I would have believed anything he told me, for I had implicit faith in him. Little did I dream that I had fallen into the hands

of a heartless scoundrel.

"As we approached London, he seemed to become nervous, yes, even sad. I was troubled and asked him to explain his changed manner.

"He merely shook his head and stared out of the window.

"Finally, after a lot of coaxing, he told me that he could not marry me at once as he had originally intended.

"He claimed that his parents might object to an alliance between us and said that it would be best to wait for a few days so he could prepare for what was coming.

"I had faith enough in him to believe that, oh, the fool that I was.

"So, quite satisfied with his explanation I followed him to a handsome building where he had a flat. He called it his bachelor quarters. In my limited experience and ignorance I did not even know what this meant.

"The moment we were alone, he began to make violent love to me. He coaxed me to drink some wine, assuring me that there was absolutely no harm in it.

"Still I trusted him.

"The wine gave me a sensation such as I had never known before. He grew passionate and bold, and I, like a blind fool, failed to see through his game. He swore that he would marry me the very next morning no matter what his parents might say or think.

"I believed him and——" here Mrs. Fairfax paused and sighed deeply, well, what happened that terrible night, I shall never forget. The following morning I dreaded to face the light of day.

"But I loved him even then," she declared. "I could not help it. Ah, if the merciful God had only striken me dead that night, what mental agony I would have been spared

"In my ignorance of the world and its wickedness I had taken the step which was to change the course of my whole life.

"Like thousands of other foolish, love-sick girls, I threw away a woman's priceless gift upon a man who did not deserve it."

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## Chapter 329

## AS YE SOW

MRS. FAIRFAX shook her head as a sudden wave of revulsion swept over her. This lengthy confession was far from complete in its revolting details. There were things to tell she shrunk from—emotions wildly sweet and divinely beautiful as they flamed scarlet in the daylight memory.

"It seems that the Creator of all things made two standards of morals for us poor mortals," she resumed. "The one for men gave them unlimited liberty. No matter what a man does, his crimes against the weaker sex are easily condoned.

"The standard for women has been a curse ever since the world began. A woman who loses her most priceless gift, her honor, becomes a thing of contempt.

"When a woman falls, she can never again regain her moral balance. She is down to stay.

"No matter under what circumstances she meets her fate, she is bound to get the worst of it. That has been my fate. And yet, I sometimes wonder if other unfortunate women were made to suffer as I was.

"On my knees I begged my lover to make me his wife the morning after that horrible night. He put me off with a very plausible excuse and I believed him.

"For three months he kept me in his flat, and I, like a credulous fool, still believed in him. I simply could not grasp that a man lived base enough to rob a woman of everything dear in life and then cast her off like a broken toy he had grown tired of.

"But that is exactly what happened to me.

"Finally I grew desperate and demanded that he keep his oft repeated promise to me. Then he grew angry. The mask slipped from his face and he stood revealed in his vile character.

"And what do you think he told me?

"'If you are tired of living with me you can go home to your parents,' he said.

"I remember well how I screamed at these words of his.

"The utter heartlessness of what he had told me drove me frantic. For hours I wept bitter tears, but all my tears and pleading were without avail.

"He merely laughed and said that I was a foolish, sentimental woman, that there was a fortune within easy reach, and he unfolded a plan so revolting to me that I struck him in the face in my unspeakable indignation and horror.

"That same night I left him.

"He made an attempt to detain me, but I fought him off and reached the street, a miserable, broken-hearted woman.

"For five long hours I sat in the waiting room of the railroad station where I intended to take the train for home. I believe I would have taken my own life had I possessed the courage.

"The frightful past was constantly before my eyes and I trembled at the thought of seeing my parents again.

"The fact that I had neglected them for so long was not a pleasant thing to contemplate. Never once had I thought of the sorrow and grief I must have caused them.

"I had written letter after letter which I had given my lover to mail, but for some reason I received no reply.

And now it suddenly it occurred to me that he had never mailed them.

"And I wondered, too, if my parents were still alive.

"I felt confident somehow, that I could win my mother over and that she would forgive me, but I dreaded to face my father. He was a man of stern character and possessed of an unforgiving nature.

"Thoroughly repentant, I boarded the train which carried me back to the peaceful little town.

"During the long, tedious ride I had ample time for reflection. What mental agonies I endured could not be expressed in mere words. But little did I suspect what a frightful surprise was in store for me.

"When the train at last stopped at the station from which I had fled some months ago, it was four o'clock in the morning.

"I could hear the birds sing their welcome, but somehow their happy songs sounded to me like a funeral dirge. In a round-about way I walked toward my old home.

"I looked in every direction like a guilty criminal, trying to locate some place to hide in case I should encounter some of my old friends or acquaintances.

"With faltering steps I approached the house. From a distance I saw something black on the door.

"With my wide eyes fastened upon it, I trudged on wearily until a sudden wave of horror paralyzed my limbs. The hideous black thing fluttering in the calm morning breeze was a crape.

"Someone was dead in the house, either my father or my mother.

"Like a woman in a trance I staggered to the back door. I knocked timidly, but there was no response.

"Then I knocked again. Still no answer. As I

pushed the door open softly I came upon a sight that suddenly froze the blood in my veins.

"My mother sat there with her face buried in her hands, weeping bitterly. Through the door beyond her I saw my father's dead body stretched out in a coffin.

"Her cry when she looked up and saw me will ring in my ears to my dying day. Not a single word of reproach did she utter when I told her my story. She only nodded her gray head and wrung her hands in a silent agony that was unbearable to me.

"Then she took me by the arm and led me to the silent figure in the other room.

" 'He died of grief,' she said. 'It broke his heart when you ran away with that man from London.'

"The tangible things of life began to slip away from me. A sickening sense of shameful humiliation and my guilt rushed over me, and I collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"When I finally regained consciousness after passing through the shadows of death, five weeks had elapsed.

"My poor father had been buried in the little cemetery on the hill. I was a shadow of my former self. Many times I prayed to die, but the gentle persuasion of my mother kept me from making an end of my misery.

"Fortunate for me, my mother had found a plausible excuse for my long absence. She told the many friends who inquired after me, that I had gone to New York to study music.

"Thus the shameful truth was withheld from the scandal mongers.

"For two years I devoted myself to my mother, who was failing fast. But it seemed I could not fill the vacancy left in her life through my father's death.

"During this time she tried in every possible way

to make me forget my one mistake.

"Not one single word of reproach ever passed her lips. By degrees she coaxed me to take a new interest in life. I began to accept invitations to social functions where I met all of my old friends.

"I can well recall how they commented upon my changed appearance, for I had grown prematurely old. I was not yet twenty-three and my hair had turned slightly gray at the temples.

"One evening as my mother and I returned from a church social, we were caught in a heavy storm which blew up suddenly.

"The rain fell in torrents and before we could reach the house we were both drenched to the skin. My mother contracted a very severe cold, which grew worse and developed into a hard, dry cough.

"We paid little attention to it at first, but as she continued to grow worse, I insisted that she see a doctor at once.

"He came one evening and examined my mother while I stood at his side and watched him. I could not help but notice the serious expression on his face and also the puzzled shake of his head which spoke volumes to me.

"I followed him outside and demanded to know the truth about my mother's condition.

"My grief was boundless when he told me that both of my mother's lungs were badly affected and that her recovery was very doubtful owing to her advanced age.

"If ever a girl prayed to the Almighty God with all her heart and soul for the return of her mother's health, I was that girl.

"I could not bear the thought of losing her.

"But all my prayers were of no avail. When the

leaves began to fall, my mother slept away, and one sad morning I found her dead in bed.

"She was buried at the side of my father in the little cemetery on the hill. I shall never forget the day I had the last glimpse of her emaciated features as she lay in her coffin. The heavens wept with me, for a fine, drizzling rain came down steadily.

"For weeks I shut myself up in the house, refusing to see anyone. I hated the empty words of sympathy and condolence uttered by friends. What I suffered, God only knows.

"Every new surprise seemed to mock me, for way down in my heart I felt that I had been my father's murderer and that I was also responsible indirectly for my mother's death.

"When at last I regained sufficient courage to face any of my friends and neighbors again, I had no more pleasure in life.

"For five years I lived comparatively like a hermit. Then one day as I visited the graves of my parents, I found a man kneeling there.

"Upon hearing me approach he rose hastily and faced me.

"He was young, apparently my own age. I wanted to say something to him but my voice was choked with tears. He was first to speak, and he told me how deeply he mourned my father's death.

"His story interested me strangely. It sounded like fiction.

"He said that he had been raised an orphan and that my father in a spirit of kindliness had taken him under his wing when still a young boy and sent him to college to be educated.

"I was greatly surprised at this. I had never even heard my father speak of this protege. But father was

known as a very reticent man who said little or nothing about all the good he did in the community. He was wealthy and much of his money went to help the poor and needy."

Mrs. Fairfax lapsed into silence. Her voice had grown singularly soft during the latter part of her narrative.

Occasionally a tear stole down her pale cheeks. She seemed to be deeply affected as the nameless grief of the dead past came back to her in all its poignancy.

Then brushing away the moisture on her face, she continued:

"Deeply impressed by the young man's story, I held out my hand. That was the beginning of our delightful friendship.

"Every evening after that he came to see me. He delighted in telling me of the various incidents in which my father had played a noble part.

"He had loved my father and worshipped his memory. Our friendship ripened into love and when he asked me to become his wife, I consented.

"I made a grievous mistake in marrying him without revealing my past. I was constantly haunted with the fear that some day he would learn the hideous truth about me.

"He was very devoted and kind—a good man in everything the words imply.

"My dead heart had been awakened to a new love. And I found out what true happiness was when the baby came. But the cruel fates were preparing another blow for me.

"My husband went to London one day on a business trip, and when he came back he was a changed man.

"I could not understand his sudden coolness

toward me. Again and again I asked him to explain, but he would merely shake his head. It was very evident that something out of the ordinary—something very serious had happened while he was in London.

"I could not stand this any longer, and one night I begged him on my knees to tell me his troubles.

"Then, with his face averted, he told me that he had found out all about my past. He had met the man who was my betrayer, and as it happened, they had been classmates at college together.

"My former lover had boasted of his conquest of me and regarded it as a good joke to lure an innocent country girl to her moral destruction.

"My husband accused me of base deception. He was very bitter because I had not made a clean breast of it all when he asked me to become his wife.

"'If I had know that,' he cried bitterly; I would never have married you.'

"I wept scalding tears and pleaded with him to forgive me. The following day I found out that he was making secret preparations to procure a divorce.

"Before the case came to trial our baby died. I was living alone then, my husband having left me. New misery came to me in another and more dreadful form as I bore the little body to the cemetery alone. I was the most wretched woman that ever lived, I believe.

"Yearning for someone to say a kind word, I made a final effort to win my husband back. I went to see him and found him closeted with his lawyer. He told me in plain words that he was through with me.

"For several days and nights I walked about the house like a maniac, constantly brooding over my predicament.

"Not a single one of my former friends called on me, for the story of my past had become public property

They shunned me like a leper and I was ashamed to go out on the street.

"In my bitterness I began to hate everybody, even myself. From a gentle loving wife and mother I grew into a hardened woman.

"I was thirsting for revenge and my sole aim in life was now to find the man who had been responsible for all my trouble.

"It was my firm intention to kill him on sight and I went to London with a loaded revolver in my purse.

"When I called at his bachelor quarters, I was informed that he had gone with a number of friends to Africa to hunt lions and other big game. But this information did not appease my revengeful spirit. Every day I went to his quarters and waited for his return.

"In the meantime I put what money I had into a rooming house and made my living by taking boarders.

"Several months passed. I had been watching the newspapers closely for some news of his return, for he was prominent in club circles. One morning I was very much surprised to read about his sudden and terrible death in the African jungles.

"With a party of friends he had gone on a lion hunt. Somehow they had become separated.

"According to the details he lost his way in the jungles and stalked into a lion's path. After two days of searching they found him literally torn to pieces. It was indeed a frightful fate, but I could not feel sorry for him.

"I felt that God had taken it into His hands to punish him, and I tried to forget him. It was hard, but I succeeded at last. That is the end of my tragic story, Graham.

"And I hope that the telling of it will make you realise that your present troubles are nothing compared

with mine of the past.

"I hope you will not let a woman show you what real courage can do under the most distressing circumstances. What I have done, you can do. For you are a man with a strong character."

Chapter 330

## THE BRIGHT SIDE

GRAHAM ERICSEN sat dumb with surprise. It did not seem possible to him that a woman could go through all this and live. His surprise gave way to intense curiosity. Aunt Cathie could not be done with the story of her life. There was still much to be explained. For she had married again and right into his own family. She had become the wife of his uncle, Tom Fairfax. He looked at her closely with a question trembling on his lips. She saw it and understood.

"Oh, I know what you are about to ask me," she cried. "I'll tell you all about that later."

"Why not now?" he grinned.

"Because I want you to think for a little while over all that happened to me, Graham," she answered. "I want you to compare my past troubles with your present ones. I wonder what you would have done if you had been compelled to——"

"I would never have survived it, Aunt Cathie," he broke in. "Ah, what a wonderful woman you must have been, and still are. You were game to the very core."

She smiled at him.

"Life was not going to keep on cheating me, my dear boy," she said. "I was determined that it should not. I never gave up hope for better things and neither must you. Will you promise me that?"

Half ashamed of himself, Graham Ericsen promised. Then he leaned back, waiting for his aunt to speak

again.

"As I mentioned before," she spoke presently, "I had started a boarding house. Then suddenly came an epidemic of the influenza. I think they called it 'Spanish Influenza.' People took sick one day and died the next.

"Trained nurses were scarce and the government called for women to volunteer. All the hospitals were overcrowded and there were not enough nurses to take proper care of all the patients.

"I volunteered at once and closed up my boarding house. The hospital to which I was assigned was in one of the London fashionable residence sections.

"All of the rich patients were taken care of in this hospital.

"One day they brought in a young man whose chances for recovery were very slim. In fact the doctors told me that he would die within twenty-four hours. As I sat at his bed watching his handsome flushed face, my heart went out to him.

"My mind was made up that he should not die. I was not going to let him. The doctors smiled at my determination.

"For three days and nights I watched over that young man. Not for a moment did I leave him unless it was absolutely necessary. I took care of him like a mother would of a sick baby. A few hours were spent in prayer.

"The crisis came and passed. My patient began to rally. I'll never forget the first time he opened his eyes and looked at me.

"When the doctor in charge of the case came in and saw the man gaze about the room wonderingly, he was speechless with surprise. And then I found out what the patient's name was, for the doctor cried:

" 'Tom Fairfax, you lucky beggar. Here we had given you up, and you fooled us all. But I want to tell you right now that you owe your life to this young woman!'

"I could feel myself blushing hotly. And the doctor made it worse by telling Tom Fairfax all I had done for him. Then came the bright side of my life. During the slow but complete recovery of the patient, we formed a friendshsip which ripened into love.

"Before Tom left the hospital, He proposed marriage to me. I was the happiest woman in the world.

" 'I cannot accept that honor,' I told him, 'until you listen to my story. If after hearing it you still want to make me your wife, I'll——'

" 'You need not tell me a thing,' he cried. 'I love you and nothing could change that."

"But I told him everything. When I finished he took me in his arms and called me his sweetheart. Since there was no objections from his family, we were married quietly within a week.

"Ah, how happy I was. And then came our baby. Marjorie was the sweetest child that ever drew breath. Unfortunately poor Tom never lived to see her grow into young womanhood. He was killed suddenly in an automobile accident.

"Since then I have been living quietly, devoting all my time and thoughts to Marjorie. I want her to be happy. And I want you, my dear boy, to be happy."

In the silence which had fallen, Ericsen felt a wave of emotion rush over him. He felt ashamed of himself.

Oh, what a coward he had been and still was. He was not fit to touch the hem of this heroic woman's dress. In spite of her advanced age she was still good to look at. She must have been beautiful in her youth.

Aunt Cathie startled him by saying seriously — "You ought to think of marrying, Graham."

"I? What for?" he said, bewildered.

"Yes, you—why not? You will lose your youth. You have been in fresh scenes, and you come back looking harassed and tired out. You are too young to have done with love. In all this time you must in your very changeful life, have seen women who could attract you."

"I have seen hundreds of pretty faces——"

"But you didn't think about them?"

"No."

She looked at him with the thought in her mind that some of the owners of the pretty faces had probably been more susceptible towards him.

He had lost nothing in good looks, and the charm and fascination that had always been his gift, were deepened.

Without wearing his heart on his sleeve, he had that nameless something which makes so interesting a man or woman who has suffered without being hardened.

"A man wants a home of his own," Mrs. Fairfax said; "it isn't the same, your making this a sort of home. You will probably outlive me, and Marjorie may marry, when perhaps you are older and have grown crystallized into solitary ways, and no longer care to be like other people."

Ericsen did not answer this, but it sank in sufficiently for him to turn it over in his mind afterwards.

What was he doing — preparing for a loveless, contracted middle age? He had seen other men get fitted in grooves and refuse to be dragged out of them.

But then, Aunt Cathie didn't know; she thought he was wasting his youth over a memory remorseful for his share in making Alice's burden unbearable.

Whereas, how could he seek any woman without

baring to her his story?

And what had he to offer her—a seared, barren life; moody thoughts she could not share; poisoned memories—worse still, shame and dishonor.

While he would want so much from her—tenderness, forbearance, soothing. No, such a marriage would be too unequal, even if it were right.

As for what Aunt Cathie had said about Marjorie, either men were blind—he, of course, not being one of them—or she was extra fastidious, as she had a right to be, being such a pearl; unless there was perhaps something——

"But I should have known if there had been," he said to himself. He was alone in the garden of the country house the Fairfaxes had taken. "She wouldn't have breathed a word, but I should have found it out. Perhaps it's as well. There isn't a man born that's good enough for her."

Naturally, following this train of thought, he went back to that illness of his—the only one in his life—inseparably connected with Marjorie, because he had absolutely depended on her.

What tenderness—what sympathy, what restfulness!

Then he paused, and looked up to the dark sky with yearning, passionate eyes and quickened breath.

"No, it isn't for me," he thought; "a better fate—love—a first love. I would be happier——"

But it was such a bright vision—that soft hand to lead him into a fairer life, as it had led him from sickness to health; that pure soul to cleanse his; that perfect faith for him to lean on; that unflinching honesty to restore his shattered trust!

What a selfish brute he was! No, it must not be.

Continued in next number

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